

## LIFE SKETCH

### GERHARD FRANZ HASEL, 1935-1994

Barren Springs, Michigan

Gerhard Franz Hasel was born in Vienna, Austria, on July 27, 1935, and was the youngest child of Franz Joseph and Helene (Schroeter) Hasel, and passed away on August 11, 1994, aged 58. At the time of death he was serving as the first John Newton draws Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology and as director of the Ph.D. and Th.D. Programs at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. Earlier he served seven years (1961-1968) as Dean of the Seminary.

He was a highly regarded scholar, an exceptionally productive writer, an effective administrator, an active leader in his local church, and a faithful and affectionate family man. If the phone rang in the middle of the night, he would get up and answer it, and if the phone rang in the middle of the day, he would get up and answer it.

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully

and wonderfully made;

Marvelous are Your works,

And that my soul knows very well. . . .

Your eyes saw my substance,

being yet unformed.

And in Your book they all were written,

The days fashioned for me,

When as yet there were none of them."

Gerhard spent the first years, 1939-1945, near Frankfurt, Germany, growing from 4 to age 10. His accounts of those years are found in his book *My Childhood*. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and was baptized in the church. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and was baptized in the church. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and was baptized in the church.

Gerhard spent the next years, 1945-1948, near Frankfurt, Germany, growing from 10 to age 13. His accounts of those years are found in his book *My Childhood*. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and was baptized in the church. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and was baptized in the church. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and was baptized in the church.

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C. Mervyn Maxwell  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Retired  
Andrews University  
Berrien Springs, Michigan

Gerhard Franz Hasel was born in Vienna, Austria, on July 27, the third and next to youngest child of Franz Joseph and Helene (*nee* Schroeter) Hasel, and passed away on August 11, 1994 aged 59. At the time of death he was serving as the first John Nevins Andrews Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology and as Director of the Ph.D. and Th.D. Programs at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. Earlier he had served seven years (1981-1988) as Dean of the Seminary.

He was a highly regarded scholar, an exceptionally productive author, an effective administrator, an active leader in his local church, and a faithful and affectionate family man. If the phone messages that have been coming to me are any indication, and I am sure they are, his death has been a deep shock to many, producing a profound sense of loss. One caller, from California, observed that Dr. Hasel was a giant who won the respect of scholars of other religions without compromising his own principles. A church leader in the East spoke of him as "a remarkable scholar whose heart was committed to the Adventist message and who was a most effective defender of the faith." The pastor of a congregation far out in the Nebraska Panhandle said, "My people dearly loved him."

FAXes have come in from several overseas divisions of the Adventist organization. One, from the Africa-Indian Ocean Division, said, "The light he lit across Africa will continue to burn brightly." His two sisters are here with us [at the funeral, August 17, 1994] from California, and his older brother from Germany. Also here are representatives from various institutions and church administrative entities.

Gerhard spent the war years, 1939-1945, in or near Frankfurt, Germany, growing from 4 to age 10. His accounts of those years have formed week-long series at camp meetings. His father, a minister and literature evangelist, was early drafted into the Wehrmacht and assigned to the Russian front. From time to time

when alone he drew courage from a fading picture of the Daniel 2 image, which he treasured in a pocket, reminding himself that Hitler must fail sooner or later. A convinced non-combatant, he nonetheless saw his share of danger, but under heaven's blessing he became one of only seven men out of his original battalion of several hundred, to return home alive. He was one of only two of the seven who came home uninjured.

Gerhard's mother took a firm stand that none of her children would attend school on the Sabbath. One crucial occasion, while her small children waited at home for her return or for their being scattered to unknown destinations, the officer who was expected to sentence her fell ill, so that at the critical moment he was replaced by an officer who had once been befriended by an Adventist couple. Gerhard's mother returned home to some very happy children. The immovable commitment of his parents to God's Word clearly contributed a lifelong attribute to Dr. Hasel's character.

The passing of years found Gerhard completing elementary and secondary schools and entering a trade school. In 1953, when he was 18, he was identified as the best apprentice in electrical engineering in all of Frankfurt and was subsequently designated the best apprentice in electrical engineering in the state of Hessen. With these impressive citations came an invitation to the Technical College in nearby Darmstadt with full scholarship support through graduate school. But as the Lord worked on his heart, he kept asking himself, "Why should I work in a field that anyone else could choose? Why don't I do something for the Lord that only I could do?"

So thinking, he turned down the proffered scholarship and enrolled in the theology program at the little Seventh-day Adventist Marienhöhe Seminary (also in Darmstadt), completing the four-year licentiate program in 1958. To meet expenses, he did colporteur work every summer, following in the footsteps of his father, who became the Publishing Director for the Central European Division. Dr. Hasel often observed later that the literature work is a most valuable preparation for the ministry.

In the summer of 1958, he and his older brother Kurt—who is now a retired pastor-evangelist in Germany—asked God for a sign. If either of them sold above a certain minimum, they would con-

clude that the Lord wanted that one to study in America; but if either earned less, that one should go to Newbold College in Britain. They entered into a covenant, separated to different areas, set to work, and did very well, except that (as Kurt remembers) Gerhard sold double what he did.

Thus in 1958 Gerhard traveled to the United States by ship and enrolled at Atlantic Union College. Gerhard's first goal was to learn English and his second, to find answers to theological questions. Among his classmates at AUC was Jim North, who in 1988 became a member of the Seminary faculty.

Building on his work at Marienhöhe, Gerhard completed (1959) a BA in one year and moved to Berrien Springs, where he earned (1960) an MA in Systematic Theology in a single year—still canvassing in the summers to pay his way. By 1962 he had a B.D. (the degree now known as an M.Div.). But in the meantime, on June 11, 1961, in Chicago, he married Hilde Schäfer. Hilde was still a student at Emmanuel Missionary College and thought she was much too young to get married. But when Gerhard persuaded her that she was unquestionably old enough, she gave her consent. "It was the best decision I ever made," she says. Over time, three children were born to them, Michael, Marlana, and Melissa, all of them now married. How good the parents looked together at Melissa's wedding, so little time ago!

Upon receiving his B.D., Gerhard served first as a pastor in Boston for a year (1962-1963) and then as Assistant Professor of Religion at Southern College for four years (1963-1967), being ordained to the gospel ministry in 1966. In 1967 he began a 27-year teaching career at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, starting as Assistant Professor and ending, as of July this year, as the first John Nevins Andrews Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology.

In 1970 he completed a Ph.D. program in Biblical Studies at Vanderbilt in Nashville. He had divided his class work evenly between New and Old Testaments, but his dissertation was based on the Old Testament: "The Origin and Early History of the Remnant Motif in Ancient Israel." A legend floats among Adventist academics that his major professor, who did not share Gerhard's confidence in Scripture as the Word of God, told a subsequent

Adventist student that Gerhard Hasel was his most brilliant student to date and was also the most firm in standing for his convictions. To help finance his university training he accepted two named scholarships, a Hillel Scholarship and a Danforth Teacher Grant.

In 1976 (-1982), when Dr. Siegfried Horn became Dean, Dr. Hasel became chairman of the Seminary's Old Testament Department and Director of the Ph.D. and Th.D. programs (1976-1994).

After Dr. Tom Blinco's Deanship, Dr. Hasel served as Dean for seven years beginning in 1981 (Sept. 1). At that time the so-called "Ford crisis" had just peaked, and church leaders around the world demanded that the denomination's premier Seminary be headed by a reputable scholar of self-evident loyalty to the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamentals. During his tenure as Dean, Dr. Hasel balanced the Seminary's budget in spite of severe financial difficulties, called several strong faculty members, led in a reorganization of the curriculum which enhanced its "practices" quality, and in general developed a Seminary that proved to be a delight to the Spring, 1989 accreditation team. Noting that our seminary was one to be proud of, "equal to any in the land," the team leader told the assembled faculty, "You should go out and celebrate." (We did.)

At the time of his death Dr. Hasel was an active member of seven learned societies<sup>1</sup> and of two honorary societies.<sup>2</sup> He was listed in nine "Who's Who" kinds of publications, including *Men of Achievement*, 6th edition, and the prestigious *Dictionary of International Biography*.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, theological concern provoked discussion at Columbia Union College and Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists about the possible formation of a new society directed against perceived permutations. Thus was born, in 1988, at Southern College, the Adventist Theological Society, with Dr. Jack Blanco as its first president. Though reluctant to provide leadership at first, Dr. Hasel became a strong president of the new organization in 1990 (-1992) and continued to give considerable attention to it until his death. He believed that what ATS stood for was vital to the work of God and to the health of this world-wide denomination.

Dr. Hasel's publishing profile is almost exhausting to con-



template. For over twenty years (1973-1994) he was Associate Editor of *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, and Circulation Manager as well for seven of those years (1973-1980). He was also an Editorial Consultant for twenty years (1974-1994) of *Origins*, the SDA journal of creation science, and for several years was a member of the Editorial Board (1990-1994) of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. He was recently appointed an associate editor of *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*. He is the only writer who has contributed a major article for each volume of the great series, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. By invitation, he wrote a brilliant article on the Sabbath for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, and at the time of his death was working on two volumes, Amos and Hosea, for Eerdmans's *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*.

Michael, his son, has compiled a list of 14 books, not counting major revisions, and 319 articles and book reviews written by his father—plus a number of titles which are still in process of publication. A relatively small number of the articles are devotional, while most are astonishingly "scholarly," with perhaps a hundred or even two hundred references to learned works in various languages. His book *The Old Testament: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* has gone through three significant revisions (or updatings) and is used in quite a number of non-Adventist colleges and seminaries in the United States and Canada, and in most of the Universities in South Africa. A non-Adventist school in Korea made a translation for the use of its students. A Portuguese translation is used in South America. His *New Testament: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* has also seen wide acceptance as a textbook. Dr. Davidson, who once made a study into the question, says that the humorous wail, "Hasel is a hassle," is heard in more Seminaries than just our own.

One test of a writer's impact in the academic world is the degree to which his books are reviewed in scholarly journals. Seminary librarian Warren Johns has so far located no fewer than 39 reviews of four of Dr. Hasel's books. He has also compiled a list of approximately 50 scholarly papers presented to learned societies and denominational study committees. Dr. Hasel's publications led

to invitations for guest lectureships in a variety of non-Adventist institutions.

Time fails to tell about Dr. Hasel's significant contributions to the 1980 Glacier View meetings, to Bible Conferences, camp meetings, and ministers' meetings around the world, and to the ongoing work of the Biblical Research Institute.

When Michael showed me his list of his father's literary output, I asked him and Melissa, who was sitting nearby, "Did your Father ever have time for you children?" They responded quickly, "O yes, lots of time!" Their mother explained that he was often home and available to the children on Friday nights and Sabbaths, and that he was conscientious about taking month-long vacations with the family—even if, at times, he spend a portion of the months speaking at a camp meeting. When he was busy, the children sensed that he was working for God. They also knew that he would "be there" for them whenever they needed him.

Yes, the children urged me to include in this life sketch that their father was never interested in self-exaltation. His objective since boyhood was to be used by God. God helped him understand the Bible because He was willing to study it, praying for God's guidance. His goal, they told me, was to find truth and to reach people for God around the world, helping them prepare for the Second Coming.

Like any man of ardor and profound conviction, it was inevitable that Dr. Hasel was at times controversial. But even those who did not agree with all his views acknowledge that he was a titan among us, one who committed robust energies and impressive intellect to the quest for truth and who exerted a tangible influence in Old Testament circles within and without our church supporting the integrity of the Bible.

Several times in his life it seemed to Dr. Hasel that God and His angels were protecting him from imminent danger, not only in his childhood during the war, but also in his adulthood. Once heavy ice developed on the wings of a small plane that was carrying him over high mountains in New Zealand. With great effort, the plane managed to clear the pass inches from the snow below. Another time, sightseeing above the Iguacu Falls on the border between Brazil and Argentina, he was startled to realize that the little boat



he was sitting in was drifting perilously toward the upper rim, even though it was directed away from it, the motor was going full blast, and the owner was paddling for all he was worth.

About 2:30 last Thursday afternoon, August 11, Dr. Hasel turned off Interstate 15 at an interchange in a built-up area near Ogden, Utah. (He was driving a rental car and was in the area to read a paper on the "days" of Genesis 1.) As he approached the four-lane artery that passed under the Interstate, he paused at the stop sign, then turned left to cross the road. In doing so, he moved directly into the path of an oncoming car, which hit his vehicle on the left side between the front wheel and the driver's door. The oncoming car was going well within the posted 55 m.p.h. speed limit. The air bag in the oncoming car protected its driver from everything but a few scratches and bruises, but Dr. Hasel's air bag, though it functioned as designed, was unable to protect him from a side blow. Dr. Hasel did not regain consciousness.

Where were the angels then?

*Education*, p. 305, says that "every redeemed one will understand the ministry of angels in his own life. The angel who was his guardian from his earliest moment; the angel who watched his steps, and covered [protected] his head in the day of peril; the *angel who was with him in the valley of the shadow of death*, who marked his resting place, who was the first to greet him in the resurrection morning—what will it be to hold converse with him, and to learn the history of divine interposition in the individual life, of heavenly co-operation in every work for humanity!"

It seems appropriate to close with comments by Ellen G. White, a cofounder of this denomination, written in respect to the sudden death of her husband at age 60.<sup>3</sup>

When he upon whose large affections I had leaned, with whom I had labored for thirty-six years [Gerhard and Hilde worked together for 33 years], was taken away, I could lay my hands upon his eyes, and say, I commit my treasure to Thee until the morning of the resurrection. . . . [Yet] at times I felt that I could not have my husband die. But these words seemed to be impressed on my mind; "Be still, and know that I am God."

I keenly feel my loss, but dare not give myself up to . . . grief. . . . We will be thankful for the years of usefulness that were granted to

him; I will look with pleasure upon his resting-place. The best way in which I and my children can honor the memory of him who has fallen, is to take the work where he left it, and in the strength of Jesus carry it forward to his completion.

I take up my life-work alone, in full confidence that my Redeemer will be with me. . . . Only a little while . . . then Christ will come. . . . We are left on earth to encounter storms and conflicts, to perfect Christian character, to become better acquainted with God our Father, and Christ our elder Brother, and to do work for the Master in winning many souls to Christ.

1 Adventist Theological Society, American Academy of Religion, American Schools of Oriental Research, Chicago Society of Religious Studies, International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Near East Archaeological Society, and Society of Biblical Literature.

2 Alpha Mu Gamma and Theta Alpha Kappa.

3 *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:111-112. Suggested by Hedwig Jemison.

GERHARD F. HASEL'S  
HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION  
(MEMORIAL SERVICE MESSAGE)

"But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. . . . For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."



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A little over a week ago the Dean of the Seminary at Andrews University, Dr. Vyhmeister, asked me to say a few words about the hope that Gerhard Hasel had in the future resurrection. A couple of days later I found myself flying west to California to arrange, attend and participate in the funeral of my own step-father, Doyle Saunders, who had died suddenly after a brief and unexpected illness. A week earlier he had been fine—in fact, he had spent a delightful weekend camping with two of his grandchildren.

Suddenly, I found myself drawn against my will into the vortex of that black hole of emptiness and pain that accompanies the loss of a loved one. Sooner than I had anticipated, I was going through a blurred twilight zone in which lack of sleep caused day and night to blend together—a time when you want desperately to be somewhere else. But the demands of reality force you to stay, notifying people of the sad news, making decisions concerning the funeral, burial arrangements, picking flowers, arranging speakers, choosing music, writing the eulogy, taking and making innumerable phone calls (at the same time both annoying and comforting), enduring the shock and strain of the viewing, meeting friends and strangers, providing comfort while being comforted, attending the funeral, driving to the graveyard for the final tearful farewell. . . .

An experience like this tends to shock one from considering a vague, dispassionate, theological discourse on the Christian's hope to a sharp focus on what that hope really is. It is not living in golden mansions, seeing lions play with lambs, flying through the universe on angel wings. I would not deny any of these things and in a certain context all of these things are important. However, the real focus of hope was summed up in a nutshell when my mother tearfully cried,—"I loved him. . . if I could only have him back."

There is our great desire to have that loved one back. Having the departed person restored to us in full life is all we really care about in the time of grief in the shadow of death. Even more painful

than my mother's sorrow, was witnessing the pain of two of my stepbrothers who had been estranged from their father. Dad was gone now. What could they say?

As I read our passage for today, John 11, I pause at vs. 35: "Jesus wept." Theologians have different ideas about why Jesus wept, but from my own experience at the funerals of loved ones, the sight that touches me the most is witnessing the pain of a spouse, a child, or a grandchild as they break out in anguished cries as the finality of the death of their loved one hits home with all of its stark, brutal force. The only thing that keeps me going at such times is the hope of the Resurrection and eternal life with our Lord and Savior.

Interestingly, perhaps providentially, one of the last subjects Gerhard Hasel applied his intellectual energies to was that of the resurrection—of the dead being *bodily* brought back to life. Michael found Gerhard's paper on the Resurrection, among many other manuscripts, in his study. Gerhard had just completed it and was intending to give it to us for final editing and formatting in preparation for publication in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. Michael gave it to us, instead. As with most of Gerhard's articles, this was not just a brief homily. Rather, it was a scholarly treatment of the subject in Gerhard's typical and thorough fashion. Although the *Journal* prefers papers to be restricted to about 20 pages for publication, this one, no doubt already vastly shortened by Gerhard, was over 50 pages and supported with nearly 200 footnotes.

Gerhard set the foundation for his subject by discussing the typical historical-critical attitudes towards the resurrection of Jesus. Not surprisingly, these views deny the bodily resurrection in real time and space—Jesus' resurrection is not really historical in this view. Gerhard's attitude towards these critical positions reminds me of C. S. Lewis who, upon the occasion of a meeting with seminarians at a British theological college, said:

A theology which denies the historicity of nearly everything in the Gospels. . . if offered to the uneducated man can produce only one or the other of two effects. It will make him a Roman Catholic or an atheist. What you offer him he will not recognize as Christianity. If he holds to what he calls Christianity he will leave a Church in which



it is no longer taught and look for one where it is. If he agrees with your version he will no longer call himself a Christian and no longer come to church. In his crude, coarse way, he would respect you much more if you did the same.<sup>1</sup>

These sentiments of C. S. Lewis are not too different, I believe, from those of Gerhard's. Like C. S. Lewis, Gerhard took a much more positive attitude regarding the historicity of Scriptural events, including Christ's resurrection. It was the reality of Jesus' resurrection that gave Gerhard—and us here, today—the hope we crave for the future—eternal life with our God and our loved ones.

After thoroughly examining the liberal scholarly perspectives, Gerhard stacks them up against what Scripture actually says, taking careful note of relevant Hebrew and Greek words and phrases. Gerhard shows that the denial of a literal, historical, bodily resurrection of Christ is not Biblical. Rather, the Scriptures clearly and unequivocally teach that Jesus was resurrected physically, in real time and space,—the bodily resurrection of Jesus was a real historical event.

Most interesting, however, are the implications that Jesus' real, historical and bodily resurrection has for the believer. After discussing a number of these implications Gerhard ends with the following section:

Resurrection and "First Fruits." In 1 Corinthians 15:20 Paul makes another profound statement, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died." Christ is here presented as the "first fruits" of those who have died. This passage reveals in its two parts the relationship between the reality/factuality of the resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent general resurrection of the dead who died in Christ.

Every expectation of a future resurrection of the dead is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was not raised from the dead as a physical reality, then no one will be raised from the dead in such a reality either. There can be no future expectation of eschatological hope unless Christ was raised bodily from the dead. "Every future expectation which is not determined by the bodily resurrection of Jesus is for Paul no real hope."

The risen Lord Jesus Christ is the "first fruits" of all believers who

have fallen asleep. His bodily resurrection is the guarantee that they too will be raised as He was raised.

The idea of "first fruits" also implies that the resurrection of the righteous will as surely follow the resurrection of Christ as day follows night (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14; 1 Thess 4:14; Rom 8:11). Believers still fall asleep, but because they are connected with Jesus Christ, the Risen One, they no longer belong under the power of the first Adam. Death has no final and ultimate power over them (1 Cor 15:25-26).

All the righteous "will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor 15:22). The verb *zoopoio*, "to make alive," expresses a future act of creation. This new creative act will happen at the proper time. All believers who remained loyal to Christ (vs. 23: "who belong to Christ" [NRSV]) will be raised "at his coming" (vs. 23). This reveals that the resurrection of the righteous is still a future event involving divine creative power. It will take place when Christ returns in the clouds of heaven; it has not taken place as yet.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is required so that there will be a genuine resurrection of His people from the dead when he returns at His Second Coming. Then the righteous will be raised (1 Thess 4:14-16) and will be "glorified with Him" (Rom 8:17), will be "with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17), will "live together with Him" (1 Thess 5:10) and will "reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12).

As believers we are reminded that even now "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:22), and when Christ returns, He "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (vs. 23, NASB). The resurrection body of the righteous will be in affinity with the immortal resurrection body of Christ. "At his coming" (1 Cor 15:23, NRSV), "at the last trumpet" (vs. 52), the righteous "dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (vss. 52-54, NRSV).

This biblical certainty is provided in and through Jesus' bodily resurrection. Knowing this, believers can "be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord" (vs. 58, NRSV). Our present faith finds its source of immovable power in the physical death *and* bodily resurrection of our Lord, historical events of the past, and in the certainty of the promised bodily resurrection *and* expected immortality as gifts of our Lord in the future.

Although Gerhard did not use this following quote from *Desire*

of Ages, p. 804, in his paper, I know he fully believed in it, and I think it gives particular comfort to those of us who are his friends and family who look forward to seeing him again.

The resurrection of Jesus was a type of the final resurrection of all who sleep in Him. The countenance of the risen Saviour, His manner, His speech, were all familiar to his disciples. As Jesus arose from the dead, so those who sleep in Him are to rise again. We shall know our friends, even as the disciples knew Jesus. They may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured, in this mortal life, and they rise in perfect health and symmetry; yet in the glorified body their identity will be perfectly preserved.

I look forward to feeling Gerhard's handshake, seeing his eyes light up with mirth as he recalls a humorous story, hearing his laughter as he shares our joy. And it is after this assurance of this hope of seeing our friend and loved one again, that we can turn back to contemplate the glories of heaven—glories that Gerhard firmly believed in. Imagine the delights in store for a scholar like Gerhard in eternity where we are told that "All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's children. With unutterable delight we shall enter into the joy and wisdom of unfallen beings. We shall share the treasures gained through ages upon ages spent in contemplation of God's handiwork. And the years of eternity, as they roll, will continue to bring more glorious revelations" (*Education*, p. 307).

My prayer today is that each one of us here will rededicate ourselves to be a part of that grand reunion, the reality of which Gerhard believed so strongly in, when Jesus comes again.

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism," in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 153.



## FUNERAL SERMON

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University

Barren Springs, Michigan

This is the most painful and agonizing message I have ever prepared or delivered. My esteemed teacher, my mentor, professor, continually called me to greater excellence, my Father Walter, beloved colleague, my theological confidant, my constant inspiration both in scholarship and personal life, my trusted and beloved friend—Dr. Gerhard Hasel—has been cut down in his prime. How can one find words to express the tragic horror of this loss?

In my grief I turned to one of the most moving poetic passages in Scripture, an ode to a fallen leader in which David mourns the loss of his loved one:

“And He will destroy on this mountain  
The surface of the covering spread over  
all people,  
And the veil that is spread over all nations.  
He will swallow up death forever,  
And the Lord God will wipe away  
tears from all faces;  
The rebuke of His people  
He will take away from all the earth;  
For the Lord has spoken.”

Just a few days before visiting Sequoia National Park in California, I was struck before the giant redwoods. We were walking among giants. I thought of the enormous strength and vitality, the awesome capacity for growth and productivity, how it was impervious to internal decay. Indeed, how it could withstand fire, storm, and the other elements of nature. It was impervious to everything except the axe of the woodman's axe and saw. Near the giant of giants—a massive stump, and a fallen trunk—a painful reminder of a giant sequoia had been cut down in its prime. Yet, though the sequoia remained a giant.

When I received word of Dr. Hasel's sudden death, I found myself comparing him with the giant sequoia. He, too, was a giant of a man. I was continually amazed by his





Richard M. Davidson  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary  
Andrews University  
Berrien Springs, Michigan

This is the most painful and agonizing message I have ever prepared or delivered. My esteemed teacher, my major professor who continually called me to greater excellence, my Doktor Vater, my beloved colleague, my theological confidant, my constant inspiration both in scholarship and personal life, my trusted and treasured friend—Dr. Gerhard Hasel—has been cut down in his prime. How can one find words to express the tragic horror of this loss?

In my grief I turned to one of the most moving poetic laments in Scripture, an ode to a fallen leader, in which David mourns the tragic loss of Israel's leader, and especially the personal loss of his beloved friend Jonathan. In the inspired poem shared with all Israel, three times David cries out: "How are the mighty fallen! How are the mighty fallen! How are the mighty fallen!" (2 Sam 1). This week the cry goes up again, in spiritual Israel, "How is the mighty fallen. A mighty leader has fallen. A spiritual giant of giants in Israel has been cut down without warning."

Just a few days ago my family was visiting Sequoia National Park in Central California. We stood awestruck before the giant sequoias: the most gigantic, living things in the world. We were amazed as we stood below one tree, a giant among giants. I thought of its enormous strength and vitality: its awesome capacity for growth and productivity, how it was impervious to internal decay or disease, how it could withstand fire, storm, and the other elements of nature. It was impervious to everything except the violence of the woodsman's axe and saw. Near this giant of giants was a massive stump, and a fallen trunk—a painful reminder of how a giant sequoia had been cut down in its prime. Yet, though fallen, the sequoia remained a giant.

When I received word of Dr. Hasel's sudden death, I couldn't help comparing him with the giant sequoia. He, too, was a giant of giants: a giant intellectually. I was continually amazed by his

memory, his knowledge, his wisdom, and insight. A giant academically, as a teacher; in research and publishing without a peer in our Adventist community.

No one had the impact upon the non-Adventist scholarly world that Dr. Hasel had. When other Adventist scholars were desperately trying to be noticed and get published by a prestigious theological press, Mr. Eerdmans himself was visiting Dr. Hasel in his office at the Seminary to request that Gerhard write another book for Eerdmans publishing house. And the requests never subsided. When I went to the Society of Biblical Literature meetings, I was treated with great respect and holy envy by many theologians of other faiths when I mentioned that Dr. Gerhard Hasel had been my major professor. Both the quantity and thoroughness of his research was enormous. He was a giant of his profession.

He was also a giant as a churchman, in local church leadership and world church responsibilities; a giant of an administrator, whether as OT Department Chairman, as Seminary Dean, or as Director of the Seminary Academic Doctoral programs; a giant as a family man, devoted dad and husband; and a giant of the Word—defending the full authority of Scripture, demonstrating how to dig deeply into the Bible and how to interpret it correctly, confirming the biblical basis and truthfulness of the Adventist mission and message; and yes, he was a giant of a friend, someone you could lean your whole weight on and know that he would never let you down. A giant of giants, impervious to decay, to fire and storm, and yet, like the tragedy of the sequoia, cut down in his prime. How has the might fallen!

Yet even fallen, he remains a giant. His stature is not diminished, will never be diminished. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on”. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds will follow them’” (Rev 14:13, NIV).

When I heard the news of Dr. Hasel’s death, I found myself repeating over and over, “Not Dr. Hasel, Lord. Why him, Lord? Why? Why?” Why did the life of this giant of a saint, with still so much to contribute to the cause of truth, have to be cut down? I received word of this tragedy while staying with my elder brother. He is no longer a practicing Christian, largely because he cannot

make sense of tragedies such as this and perceives God as capricious and uncaring. When I told him the news about Dr. Hasel, his penetrating question stung me, "Where was God during this accident?"

I could not give him an easy, pat answer. There are no easy answers. We don't know all the rules of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, when God is able to step in and avert tragedy, and when He must not in order that the issues in the great controversy may be clarified and the horrible effects of sin and Satan's work may be revealed. Job did not get an answer why his sons and daughters were suddenly killed. The Bible does not tell us why innocent Jonathan was allowed to die with his father, why John the Baptist was permitted to be killed, why millions of innocent saints were not protected from being cut down in their prime.

My brother is a physicist, and I shared with him something from the natural world that to me provides a parallel with the spiritual world. I recently learned that the new physics, called quantum mechanics, has found that on the subatomic level, things seem to be largely random and unpredictable, even unexplainable and apparently contradictory in patterns of activity. Yet, when one moves to the big picture, to the observable world and the laws of Newtonian physics, everything works together in perfect harmony and orderliness with intricate design.

I suggested to my brother that we are now only able to experience the little picture of reality, parallel to the subatomic level studied in quantum mechanics, in which many details are unexplainable and do not make sense. But God knows the big picture, the cosmic perspective. And as with the harmonious laws of Newtonian physics, could we but see reality as God sees it, in the larger perspective of the great controversy, we would understand and concur with His mysterious providence.

No, we can't understand and answer the WHY questions now, but like Job, we continue to trust—trust that "[B]ehind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, Keeping watch above His own" (*James Russell Lowell*). With his passing Dr. Hasel's death joins with those Christians whose innocent and untimely

deaths cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge" (Rev 6:10, NKJV) and make things right? (Rev 6:10).

The good news is that he and they will not have to wait much longer! In the investigative judgment, about which Dr. Hasel wrote so profoundly and passionately, God's saints, both sleeping and alive, will soon be vindicated and Satan will be unmasked.

In 1879, shortly after the death of James White, who died at about the same age as did Dr. Hasel, Ellen White had a symbolic vision of the investigative judgment. In this vision people were classified under different headings that best represented the trend of their lives. She wrote, "Upon one page of the ledger, under the head of 'Fidelity,' was the name of my husband," (*Life Sketches*, p. 242). As I read her description of the noble character and untiring service of James White, I couldn't help but think of Dr. Hasel when she wrote—"unbending integrity and noble courage to vindicate the right and condemn the wrong. . . He has stood in defense of the truth without yielding a single principle to please the best friend. . . . The truth sent out from the press was like rays of light emanating from the sun in all directions," (*Ibid.*, pp. 243-4). I believe that upon the same page of the ledger with James White, under the heading of "Fidelity," is the name of Dr. Gerhard Hasel.

Soon the investigative judgment will be over and Dr. Hasel and all God's saints will be vindicated. Satan and evil will be justly condemned. Christ will lay aside His priestly attire and clothe Himself with His most glorious kingly robes. He will leave heaven and come to awake His sleeping saints.

If Dr. Hasel were to have a message for us this morning, I believe he would point us to the blessed hope of the Second Advent of Jesus and the Resurrection of His saints. Dr. Hasel wrote major articles and devoted much research to the biblical topic of the Resurrection, especially in the Old Testament. It is with fondness that I remember him reading to us students with forceful vigor from the book of Isaiah which he loved so much: "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. . . And it will be said in that day: 'Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation'" (Isa 25:8, 9, NKJV). "Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body

they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isa 26:19, NKJV). Again, from Hosea, the book Dr. Hasel was working on for the major (NICOT) commentary series: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!" (Hos 13:14, NKJV).

I hear Dr. Hasel's confident statement of faith in the words of Job: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27, NKJV).

I have just finished rereading Dr. Hasel's article on the resurrection which he published in a prestigious German theological journal. There he quotes Daniel 12:2—"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (NKJV). In that scholarly article, Dr. Hasel forcefully dares to point out the biblical basis for what is uniquely taught by Seventh-day Adventists—the reality of a special resurrection of God's faithful saints who have died among the remnant in the last days.

And now, my brothers and sisters, and particularly the immediate family of Gerhard, our blessed assurance is that Dr. Hasel will experience the resurrection about which he wrote. God will soon raise up His faithful, spiritual giant in the special resurrection, so that he may join the remnant in watching the Lord's return, and may join us in that shout of triumph: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us!"

Perhaps the greatest NT resurrection promise is 1 Corinthians 15. It draws on the OT resurrection passages and contains those wonderful words of hope in describing the Second Coming: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. . . . then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is



swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?'" (1 Cor 15:51-55, NKJV).

After giving such an assuring and glowing portrayal of the resurrection, Paul concludes his discussion with a "therefore" (vs. 58): "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (NKJV).

This final verse of 1 Corinthians 15 I believe captures the essence of Dr. Hasel's life—steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that his labor was not in vain in the Lord.

And it comes as a "therefore" for all of us who remain to emulate his life. Ellen White wrote after the death of her husband, "The best way in which I and my children can honor the memory of him who has fallen, is to take the work where he left it, and in the strength of Jesus carry it forward to completion. . . ." She then continues in counsel also for those beyond the immediate family: "Some who have stood in the forefront of the battle, zealously resisting incoming evil, fall at the post of duty; the living gaze sorrowfully at the fallen heroes, but there is no time to cease work. They must close up the ranks; seize the banner from the hand palsied by death, and with renewed energy vindicate the truth and the honor of Christ" (*Life Sketches*, pp. 253-254; [= *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:111-112]).

Dr. Hasel gave this same kind of counsel to me repeatedly. After we had discussed the many problems and challenges facing the church, he would almost invariably say, "But we can't be discouraged! The Lord is in charge of this work! The most exciting days in the history of the world are just ahead. We must press forward with unwavering faith and confidence in the Lord. His work will triumph!"

When I learned of Dr. Hasel's death, I was in Colorado just ready to head into the Rockies for a backpacking trip. I could not return here immediately without first seeking out a quiet place to think and pray in the majesty of those rugged mountains that he and his family also loved. With my son, I climbed one of the mountains that is over 14,000 feet high, Mt. Lincoln, named after another fallen giant, and in the privacy of my thoughts on that



wind-swept summit, I poured out my heart in anguish to God over the loss of Dr. Hasel. Then in the register at the top, I signed my name, adding a note in memory of my beloved friend Gerhard. In that register I also wrote of my recommitment to the cause of truth for which Dr. Hasel gave his whole life. I determined to take up the torch which he carried so nobly and courageously, and to carry it with renewed energy and dedication.

May I invite all here this day who share in the blessed hope, to hear Paul's "therefore" in 1 Corinthians 15, to join me in taking up the work where Dr. Hasel left it, to determine anew to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Dr. Hasel, we miss you! Fallen giant, there is an irreplaceable void in our hearts and lives and community and church with your passing. But as you sleep, awaiting the special resurrection, we make a commitment to see you again soon, to spend eternity in the new heavens and the new earth with you! Maranatha! May the Lord soon come!

Many have written tributes to Dr. Hasel. I received one early this morning from a German brother which poetically expresses many thoughts of this sermon.

#### Gerhard Hasel

Like a mighty oak he stood, 'mid a forest of his peers,  
Undaunted and unshaken by the blasts of many years.  
His roots were firmly anchored, 'mid the rocks of God's true Word,  
Giving purpose and conviction to his every deed and word.

With zest and urgent purpose, he did God's word explore  
Like a miner in a cavern, in his quest for precious ore.  
And the gems that he uncovered, were not his to hoard and hide,  
But be shared in joy with others as he called them to his side.

With voice and pen, in thought and deed, in every waking hour  
He sought to guide his fellowmen, to the Source of all true power.  
The Bible was the treasure house from which he drew his store,  
And though he freely shared them all, he never lacked for more.

We mourn this brother's passing and he is laid to rest,  
We ponder for a reason, but 'tis a senseless quest.  
With longing hearts we wait the day, when death a conquered foe  
Shall never make its presence known, nor cause us tears and woe.

Where death has laid a giant down, ten thousand more must rise  
And take truth's sword that he laid down, and champion for the prize.  
Take heart my friend, 'twill be not long when we our Saviour see,  
And with our loved ones laid to rest shall home in glory be.

By Werner Lehmann